

JUNE 25, 1987

The big change in TV from Western to space pilots and star war dramas sure seems to have chilled the cowboy ambition in young men. Other than a few cases like the two boys that live close to the ranch, you have to move on up into the 30-year-olds to see many big crowds of western dressed gents and their wives and girl friends gathered at the roping arena in the City Park to rope and socialize. I can't say how they'd be to help rounding up, but as loud as the fans holler, they might come in handy making the stock think a big crew of men were coming after them.

I've thought about trying to induce the ropers to come out on a Saturday and just rope and tie down everything that needed to be sprayed or marked. It's a far-fetched idea, but unless we find a solution to the labor shortage, the supply of full-ears and bull claves may exceed all records. Granted, the roping would make the cattle wild; nevertheless, they aren't going to get gentle running, unchecked in the pastures.

Before the supply of cowboys became so small, herders used to say over and over that they wouldn't have a rodeo hand on their place because he'd be roping their calves and running their old ponies down. I think what they really meant was that they wanted a cowboy who hadn't ever been allowed enough time off the know what a rodeo was.

in those days ranchers thought a short nap from 10 p.m. at night to 3 or 4 a.m. was pampering the help. Had they hired a calf roper to work for them, he'd have been so worn out by the second day that he couldn't have thrown a loop far enough to keep from catching his horse's front foot.

In that period, one of my great uncles was the biggest operators in our family. He ran a large scope of land in the Shortgrass Country. Thousands of head of sheep and lots of cattle covered his ranches, but what he was most noted for was inventing the idea of writing notes to go on his cowboys' pillows to remind them to shut off a pump jack at midnight so his cows could have a fresh drink at daybreak.

Old Uncle ended up having nearly as many ex-employees as the U.S. Army. For a long time after he was dead, I ran into room clerks and land surveyors and road grader operators, to name just a few of his old hands, who'd recognize my name because they'd once worked for him.

After I caught onto how they felt about their former employer, I started brushing it off by claiming that I'd been adopted off a doorstep and my foster parents thought up the name "Noelke" by accident.

The two neighbor boys came by the other night to use my telephone. A little green pool hall chalk was showing on their black hat brims. That's a good sign that the school teacher stuff is wearing off and a bit of hope that they may turn out to be cowboys.

I wish Marshall Dillon's show would make a comeback on television. Next Sunday I'm going to stop and make some friends at the roping arena.